

is it • the best of Melba Moore

1 I Am His Lady (Morgan Ames) R&B #2, 6/75

2 Lean On Me (V. McCoy - J. Cobb) R&B #17, 7/76

3 This Is It (Van McCoy) R&B #18/Pop #91, 4/76

4 Falling (F. Gold - G. McFadden) R&B #1, 11/86

5 I Can't Complain (McFadden - McKinney - Vitali) R&B #29, 9/85

6 It's Been So Long (Howard King) R&B #6, 3/87

7 Keepin' My Lover Satisfied

(F.Jackson - P.Jones III) R&B #14, 10/83

8 A Little Bit More (McFadden - Vitali - McKinney) R&B #1, 9/86

9 Livin' For Your Love (Lala) R&B #6/Pop #108, 1/84

10 Love Me Right (Paul Lawrence Jones III) R&B #15, 4/84

11 Love The One I'm With (A Lot Of Love)

(Kashif-P. Gurvitz) R&B #5, 6/86

12 Love's Comin' At Ya (Paul Lawrence Jones III) R&B #5, 8/82

13 Mind Up Tonight (Lillo Thomas) R&B #25, 11/82

14 Read My Lips (S.Lorber - M.Stone) R&B #12, 3/85

15 Take My Love (Kashif) R&B #15, 9/81

16 You Stepped Into My Life (M.Gibb - B. Gibb - R.Gibb) R&B #17/Pop #47, 10/78

Chart positions refer to peak position and debut date on "Billboard"'s "Top/Best Selling R&B Singles" and "Hot 100" charts. Courtesy of Billboard Publications, Inc. and Joel Whitburn.



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nown as a very personable performer and a dynamic singer with an enviable vocal range and a certain soulful sensibility, New York born Melba Moore racked up hit records with considerable consistency for over a decade from the mid '70s to the late '80s.

In complete contrast to other recording artists and performers who plot career courses that eventually lead them to Broadway, Melba began her pathway to recording success by starring in major hit shows while in her early twenties. Melba was born into a musical family: both her mother and father were entertainers and she noted in a 1982 interview, "I wouldn't say that my parents pushed me into the business, at least not knowingly, because they wanted us (me, my three brothers and my sister) to have 'real' jobs..." But being an entertainer was clearly in her genes and after spending a year as a music teacher, Melba began setting her sights on a career in show business in the late '60s.

Her earliest years were spent doing background work as a session vocalist in and around New York, singing on records by Jerry Butler, Andy Williams, Dionne Warwick, Aretha Franklin, and Johnny Mathis, among others. One of her backup colleagues at the time was none other than Valerie Simpson (famed singing, songwriting and producing partner with Nick Ashford). "Those were great days," she recalled in a 1975 interview with Britain's "Blues & Soul" magazine, "and I used to love to sight read and get involved in all those harmonies..."

It was one such recording session that brought

Melba to the attention of producer Galt MacDermott, one of the musical forces behind the Broadway show "Hair." Melba soon found herself treading the boards in that popular show and two years later, she was cast as the female lead in the musical "Purlie," playing opposite actor Cleavon Little.

It was her stint in that 1970 production which brought Melba widespread critical acclaim, immediate popularity among New York audiences and a prestigious Tony Award. Using what would become her trademark flair for vocal dramatics, Melba's "I Got Love" became a consistent showstopper and a song that became a fixture in her repertoire even after she'd left the play in the mid '70s.

As she noted in a 1975 interview with "Blues & Soul," playing Broadway may have had its virtues, but it also meant that she had been typecast and record companies were reluctant to take her on as a legitimate recording artist. "I guess people feel I'm doing everything backwards. As you know, normally you'd go from records to Broadway...People tend to label you and I guess having been in (Broadway) shows, people have tended to question my 'blackness.' But...if you go back to the beginning, I originally wanted to be an opera singer! When I realized that being black would be such a barrier to making it in that field, I decided to branch

into pop and then everyone told me I was too 'legitimate'! I had to constantly reassure people of my identity, of my 'soul' and yes, it was hard."

Fortunately, Melba perservered and after a couple of early '70s hitless albums for Mercury Records, she signed with Buddah Records in 1975. Her first project for the company was *Peach Melba*, produced by respected songwriter (and former hitmaker in his own right) Gene McDaniels, whose songs had been recorded by artists like Roberta Flack ("Feel Like Makin' Love") and Gladys Knight & The Pips.

The LP provided Melba with her very first charted hit ("I Am His Lady") but even more significantly, it allowed her to perform on high profile concert tours with artists like Al Green, exposing her musical talents to R&B audiences for the first time.

In 1976, with disco in full swing, Melba experienced her first Top 20 R&B hit with "This Is It," taken from the album of the same name and produced by the late Van McCoy, who had scored a major hit the previous year with "The Hustle." While the album's title track was a popular item with dance fans, it was the gut-wrenching ballad "Lean On Me" that was the one song that survived as a permanent and mandatory part of Melba's live show.

Originally recorded by Aretha Franklin as the flipside to her 1971 hit "Spanish Harlem" and recut by Broadway-star-turned-recording-



artist Vivian Reed, the song had been a part of Melba's show for four years before she recorded it. She was unaware that McCoy had actually co-written "Lean On Me" but once Melba put it on tape, it became her definitive theme song, the one tune guaranteed to bring audiences to their feet, especially when Melba sang one single note towards the end of the song that lasted for almost three minutes! She later revealed in interviews that her ability to hold the note for so long was due to circular breathing techniques she learned while studying yoga.

Certainly, Melba's stock with audiences was increasing: she returned to Broadway to star in the 1978 musical "Timbuctoo," headlined at prestigious venues like New York's Metropolitan Opera House and enjoyed one more successful album (*Melba*) and three more hits with Buddah before switching to Epic Records in 1978.

The move proved intially fortuitous. Melba scored her first (and to date, only) Top 40 pop hit with her version of The Bee Gees' dance-flavored "You Stepped Into My Life" taken from her Epic album also named *Melba*. However, subsequent recordings for the label failed to make much of an impression and after three years, she was on the move again, signing with EMI America in 1981.

Talking about the impending release of her EMI debut (*What A Woman Needs*), Melba was philosophical about the fact that she hadn't had a string of major hits, noting in an early '82 "Blues & Soul" interview, "...the big thing that I did between this album and the last one for Epic was come to grips with what it takes to get

that big hit. I learned to pay attention to the politics of the industry. I felt frustrated until I learned that there was more to it than just the music..."

Produced by then up-and-coming hit writer/producer and former B.T. Express member Kashif, "Take My Love" became Melba's biggest hit to date after it began climbing the charts in the fall of 1981. The musical partnership obviously worked: Melba reunited with Kashif for her first Top 5 R&B hit. The infectious "Love's Comin' At Ya" from the 1982 LP *The Other Side Of The Rainbow*, signalled a switch to another part of the EMI family, appearing on Capitol Records.

With Kashif's trademark sound, "Mind Up Tonight" became an R&B Top 30 single for Melba as 1982 turned into 1983. By this juncture in her career, Melba had married Charles Huggins, a New York promoter who had also become her manager. With Melba as his first major client and originally his partner in the company, Huggins created Hush Productions and by the mid '80s, the firm was considered one of the hottest management companies in the black music arena.

Melba's 1983 album *Never Say Never* (which included a re-recording of 1975's "Lean On Me") provided her with no less than three charting R&B singles: "Keepin' My Lover Satisfied," "Livin' For Your Love" (a Top 10 R&B hit) and "Love Me Right," and although none of them saw significant

pop action, they reconfirmed Melba's status as an R&B stalwart.

Constant touring kept Melba in the record buying public's eye and key television appearances (including an early '80s much acclaimed role as African-American pioneer Harriet Tubman on a made for television movie) didn't hurt.

Her next recording project helped maintain the momentum with the 1985 Top 15 R&B hit, the rock-flavored "Read My Lips." That same year, one of Melba's protégés (and, naturally a client for Hush Productions' management company) started making strides in his own career. Freddie Jackson, who had been a background singer with Melba for a couple of years, recorded his first album for Capitol and went swiftly from the background to the foreground with "Rock Me Tonight (For Old Times Sakes)," and "You Are My Lady."

Jackson opened for Melba in concert dates in 1985 and he repayed the favor the following year by giving his musical mentor the first of two No. 1 R&B singles. "A Little Bit More," a duet between Melba and Freddie, spent five months on the chart while "Falling," a sensual ballad, became a firm radio favorite and an obvious audience pleaser. Both singles were taken from the album *A Lot Of Love*, her highest charting LP which peaked at no. 91 in late '86. It contained another hit single in "It's Been So Long" (featuring Dennis Collins) but it was over a year until she graced the charts again.

Taken from her 1988 LP I'm In Love, Melba's



last big record came as a second duet with Freddie Jackson. "I Can't Complain" made its way into the Top 15 R&B listings in the late spring of 1988 but it was clear that Melba's career was undergoing some obvious changes. At the time of the release of her last album for Capitol, 1990's *Soul Exposed*, she revealed that she and husband/manager Huggins had clearly been experiencing some problems in keeping personal and professional matters separate.

Unfortunately, Melba wasn't able to sort out her marital difficulties and she and Huggins separated a few years ago. Since the release of her 1990 swan song album for Capitol, Melba Moore hasn't done any new recording. However, this compilation provides testimony to Melba's twelve years as a much-appreciated, popular and consistent R&B hitmaker.

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## This Is It the best of lelba



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